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STUDIES IN THE PSALTER¹

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A. Book I is the most homogeneous and consistent group of psalms in the Psalter. With four exceptions they are all Davidic psalms and many of them so similar in content that if they were read through at a sitting the impression of monotony would be very strong. Certain psalms stand out, like Pss. 8, 19, 22, 32, but the collection as a whole is strikingly repetitious. The anonymous exceptions, therefore, are all the more noticeable. But on examination one of these (Ps. 10) disappears. We have seen that it is a part of Ps. 9 (a Davidic psalm) and actually combined with it in the Septuagint. Pss. 1 and 2 are remarkable as being Orphan psalms. Further it is noticeable that these two psalms are not within the David psalms but stand in front of them. Again it is an interesting fact that in some Hebrew manuscripts Ps. 2 is united with Ps. 1 and in others Ps. 2 is counted as Ps. 1 (so also in what is probably the original reading at Acts 13:33; cf. D and Origen), probably also implying that it was regarded as a part of Ps. 1, or else that Ps. 1, as an introductory psalm, was not counted. The contents of the two psalms (Ps. 1 in praise of the Law, Ps. 2 a great prophecy) suggest that both were placed here as the introduction not only to the first Davidic collection but to the entire Psalter. Their position would then be due to the latest stage of the redaction. It is interesting to note that their anonymous character agrees more with Books IV-V than with Books I-III.

There remains Ps. 33. As Pss. 1 and 2 did not belong to the Davidic collection and Ps. 10 was really a Davidic psalm, Ps. 33 is really the only anonymous psalm in this first collection. The Septuagint supplies a "David," but the other versions agree with the Hebrew in omitting it. The addition of the title is more easily accounted for than its omission, and hence the psalm was probably

¹ Continued from the October issue of the *Biblical World*.

originally anonymous. In that case it was probably smuggled into this Davidic collection at a later date. This anonymous psalm in its present anomalous position is a striking witness to the obscure, irrecoverable history of much of the Psalter.²

B. If we now turn to the Elohim Psalter and scrutinize it more closely it will be seen that it can be broken up into several minor Psalters.³ Our invaluable little fossil, 72:20, must again furnish us with the clue. The editorial note, 72:20, could not have stood originally after a heterogeneous group of psalms by different authors. It can have stood naturally only after a group of Davidic psalms. This correct observation was the basis of the rearrangement of the Elohim Psalter described above. But we are not to argue from this note that the Davidic psalms (Pss. 51-72) once preceded the Korah psalms (Pss. 42-49) but rather that they once *existed as a separate collection*. Ps. 72:20 is not the work of the final editor of the Psalter, but of the earlier editor of the Davidic group (Pss. 51-72). In this group of Davidic psalms Ps. 72 is ascribed to Solomon. As there is no group of Solomonic psalms its present place at the end of the Davidic collection is intelligible and not inconsistent with the concluding note. On the other hand, Pss. 45, 66, 67, 71 are anonymous (LXX again attributes Pss. 67 and 71, not 66, to David, as in the case of Ps. 33). The position of Pss. 66, 67, and 71 is as inexplicable as is the position of Ps. 33.

Our next datum is the anomalous association of the Korah psalms with the Davidic psalms instead of with the Asaph psalms. We should expect the two groups of Levitical psalms to stand together. But instead of supposing that the two Levitical groups originally stood together and were given their present singular position by the Elohim redactor, it seems much simpler and safer to infer that the Korah and Davidic collections once *circulated together*. This should account for the fact that we find them joined in one book and separated from the Asaph psalms, and at the same time the division between Book II and Book III would be seen to be historically justified.

² Cf. n. 9.

³ We have already found that Pss. 84-89 are an addendum to it.

In the middle of the Korah-David collection stands the isolated Asaph psalm (Ps. 50). How did it get here? It is impossible to say, though its affinity with Ps. 51:16, 17 gives rise to interesting conjectures.⁴

If our analysis of Books I-III has been correct, the following stages in the growth of the Psalter are thus far discernible: There was once a time when at least two independent collections of Davidic psalms (Pss. 3-41 and Pss. 51-72) were in circulation (whether at the same time and in the same places is another question). There were also two independent collections of Levitical psalms (the Korah psalms, Pss. 42-49, and the Asaph psalms, Pss. 73-84). This is the first stage. The second stage is represented by the combination of the Korah and David psalms into one group with Ps. 50 probably inserted between them. This collection was identical with the present second book. In the third stage the Asaph psalms were added to the Korah-David psalms just as they stood and the three groups subjected to the great Elohim redaction. The fourth stage is represented by the Jehovistic appendix to this Elohim Psalter. It is possible that we may go one step farther and say that the fifth stage was marked by the union of Book I with the Elohim Psalter. The striking agreement between the redaction of Book I and Books II and III illustrated in their titles, as contrasted with the redaction of Books IV-V, suggests that the first three books were closely associated. Book I was certainly added after the Elohim redaction, otherwise the psalms in Book I also would have been redacted. It is quite possible that these Jehovistic David psalms were added to the Elohim Psalter about the time that the Jehovistic appendix was attached to it. The latter less extensive accretion may have led the way to the greater accretion in the addition of Book I. But this of course is speculation.

C. Our final task in studying the form of the Psalter is the analysis of Books IV and V.

Here Pss. 120-34, the Songs of Ascents, may be isolated at once and regarded as an independent collection. The most probable translation of the common title at the head of each of these psalms

⁴I hope elsewhere to discuss the position of Ps. 50 more at length.

corroborates this. It is not to be translated "A Song of Ascents," as if this were the title of each individual psalm, in spite of the fact that the ancient versions so understood it, but, in accordance with a peculiar Hebrew idiom, "The Songs of Ascents." The title is thus seen to be the title of the *collection*, from which the individual songs were taken.

The interpretation of the Hebrew word *ma'aloth* ("Ascents," A.R.V.) as Pilgrimages still remains the most natural interpretation. Accordingly Pss. 120-34 once comprised an independent collection entitled "The Pilgrim Songs."⁵ Another group of psalms is the group of Hallel psalms, i.e., those psalms which are either introduced or concluded by the liturgical addition *Hallelujah* ("Praise ye Jehovah"). But that these once formed an *independent* collection is more than doubtful. The Hallel psalms do not form a clear-cut group like the Davidic psalms of the first two books or the Korah or Asaph or Pilgrim psalms. They are distributed in *series* in the last two books as follows: Pss. 104-6, 111-13, 115-17, 135, 146-50.

Further, the tradition as to the Hallels varies in a remarkable way. According to the Hebrew text there are really three kinds of Hallels: (a) those which have only a final Hallel, Pss. 104, 105, 115, 116, 117; (b) those which have only an initial Hallel, Pss. 111, 112; and (c) those which have *both* an initial and a final Hallel, Pss. 106, 113, 135, 146-150. The LXX, on the contrary, consistently has only the *initial* Hallel. When there is a concluding Hallel in the Hebrew text, this is either omitted, if the following psalm has an initial Hallel, or it becomes the initial Hallel of the following psalm if the initial Hallel is wanting in the Hebrew.

The result of these changes is greater regularity in the series of Hallel psalms. Thus the final Hallel of Ps. 104 becomes the initial Hallel of Ps. 105 and Ps. 104 is excluded from the Hallels. On

⁵ The explanation of *Ascents* of the steplike rhythm of some of these psalms (e.g., Ps. 121) is too artificial, and, further, this rhythm is not characteristic of *all* of the Songs of Ascents (e.g., Ps. 132). The name has also been explained by the tradition that these fifteen psalms were sung on the fifteen steps which led from the court of the women to the court of the men in the temple inclosure on the first evening of the Feast of Tabernacles. But this explanation is based on a misunderstanding of a talmudic passage.

the other hand, the final Hallel of Pss. 106, 113, 117, and 135 becomes the initial Hallel of Pss. 107, 114, 118, and 136, respectively, and we arrive at a new series of Hallel psalms, viz., Pss. 105-7 (instead of Pss. 104-6), 111-18 (Pss. 114 and 118 now included), 135 and 136, and 146-50.⁶

This is a better arrangement than the Hebrew text, (a) because Ps. 107 is more intimately connected with Pss. 105, 106 than is Ps. 104; (b) because Pss. 118 and 136 were regarded as Hallel psalms in the earliest Jewish tradition and Ps. 136 is further closely connected with Ps. 135; (c) because Ps. 114, if it were not a Hallel, would break the group of Hallels 111-17 (118) in an unaccountable way.

Yet the arrangement of the LXX text, though better than the Hebrew, is itself more or less artificial. For example, the tone of Ps. 106, from vs. 6 on, is anything but joyous. It is altogether probable that vss. 1-5 have been added for liturgical purposes. In other words, Ps. 106 was not originally a Hallel. Again the LXX joins together Pss. 114 and 115. While Ps. 114 is only a torso, the beginning of a historical review like Pss. 105-7, yet Ps. 115 cannot have been its original continuation. Yet on the theory of the LXX, which only allows initial Hallels, Ps. 115 would not be a Hallel unless joined to Ps. 114 and subsumed under the initial Hallel of that psalm.

These variations in the tradition and artificialities in the arrangement of the Hallel psalms render the theory of a special collection of Hallel psalms quite improbable.

A third group of psalms may be distinguished in Book IV, the so-called Royal psalms, Pss. 93-100⁷ in which the phrases *Jehovah reigns* or *Jehovah is King* are constantly recurring. But while these psalms form a group closely connected in temper, thought, and style, there is no evidence that they formed a Psalter.

Finally we meet with a number of Davidic psalms in Books IV and V. But these do not form a distinct group of psalms as

⁶ The LXX also includes Ps. 119 among the Hallels and this, too, is recognized in the later Jewish tradition. In the case of Pss. 105 and 146-49 the LXX *omits* the final Hallel of the Hebrew text. Only in the case of Ps. 150 are *both* the initial and the final Hallels retained.

⁷ Pss. 94 and 95b interrupt these Royal psalms in an unfortunate way.

in Books I and II, but are distributed through the last two books in an almost haphazard fashion. There are, (*a*) the two isolated Davidic psalms, Pss. 101 and 103, in Book IV; (*b*) the two clusters of Davidic psalms in Book V, viz., Pss. 109-10 and Pss. 138-45; and (*c*) the isolated Davidic psalms scattered through the Pilgrim Psalter (Pss. 122, 124, 131, and 133). There is no evidence here of any third collection of Davidic psalms.

If we look at the collection in Books IV and V as a whole, its miscellaneous character is in striking contrast with the orderly, symmetrical arrangement of the preceding books.

- a*) Pss. 90-92 may possibly be regarded as forming a little topical group.
- b*) Pss. 93-100, the Royal psalms (interrupted by Pss. 94 and 95*b*).
- c*) Pss. 101-4, isolated psalms, of which Pss. 101 and 103 are assigned to David.
- d*) Pss. 105-7 (LXX), Hallels; anonymous.
- e*) Pss. 108-10, Davidic.
- f*) Pss. 111-18 (119? LXX), Hallels; anonymous.
- g*) Pss. 120-34. The Pilgrim psalms.
- h*) Pss. 135-36 (LXX) Hallels; anonymous.
- i*) Ps. 137, isolated; anonymous.
- j*) Pss. 138-45, Davidic.
- k*) Pss. 146-50, Hallels; anonymous.

One final question remains to be answered in connection with Books IV and V. Is the book-division at the end of Ps. 106 justified? We have seen that there are good historical reasons for the divisions at the end of Book I and Book III and even at the end of Book II. These books originally represented independent psalters. But is this the case with Books IV and V? It has all along been assumed that it is not, that the division here is purely artificial. The more detailed discussion of this point will have to be deferred, however, till a later point in our investigation.